Faces of Jesus: Christology from the New Testament to the 21st Century (SC-655)
Fall 2007

An exploration of the portraits of Jesus in the major New Testament writings, the non-canonical gospels of recent Da Vinci Code fame, and in the history of the church and the arts from the first to the twenty-first century, concluding with contemporary Christologies in the writings of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, in film, and in the newer psychological approaches of John Miller and Don Capps, exploring their implications for faith in the church today.

Meeting Day, Time and Dates:
Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6:50 p.m., beginning September 12

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* "Through the centuries the portraits of Jesus have varied from age to age and place to place: ‘Good shepherd’ during the early church persecutions; ‘cosmic ruler’ during the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire; ‘the crucified’ in the guilt-ridden late Middle Ages.” - John Miller

* "Jesus is a much underrated man. To deprive this man of his humanity is to deprive him of his greatness.” - Albert Nolan

* "Jesus Christ, his son, who is his word proceeding from silence.” - Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 100 C.E.)

* "There was a great teacher, and gathered around him was a small group of faithful followers. They listened to his message and were transformed by it. But the message alienated the power structure of his time, which finally put him to death but did not succeed in eradicating his message, which is stronger now than ever.” That description would apply equally to Jesus and Socrates. But nobody’s ever built a cathedral in honor of Socrates. -Jaroslav Pelikan

* "There is no historical task which so reveals someone’s true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus.” - Albert Schweitzer

* "Who do you say that I am?” -Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 8:29)

Books for Purchase

* Powell, Mark Allan. Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Course Objectives:

1) To develop an appreciation of (a) the distinctive Christology of each of the New Testament authors, with special attention to the Synoptic Gospels, John, and Paul; (b) the Christology of the Early church with special attention to the Apostolic Fathers and the apocryphal Gospels; (c) a survey of the Christology of twenty centuries of Christian devotion and theology; (d) the Christology of the arts, with special attention to the novel and film; (e) the Christology of contemporary Jesus historians.

2) To develop an acquaintance with the present state of biblical scholarship over the past half century. Special attention will be given to the work of Jesus historians, Borg and Crossan, and psycho-historians Capps and Miller, within the perspective of the constructive critique offered by Hal Childs in The Myth of History and the
Evolution of Consciousness.

3) To take a step forward toward understanding how the words, acts, person, and presence of the "historical Jesus" relate to twenty centuries of Christological art, architecture, theology, music, literature, creeds, educational institutions, hospitals, and agencies of human service.

4) To work toward a better understanding of why it is that Jesus of Nazareth has exercised such a catalytic effect on the human psyche/soul, as evident not only within the Christian church and its institutions, but in world religious tradition and the arts.

5) To sort out one’s own perspective on Jesus and the Christological tradition and to consider the implications this might have for the way I get out of bed tomorrow.

Course Requirements

The following requirements apply especially to students taking the course for credit or for CEU’s. Non-credit students may elect to participate in the class reports and special exegetical studies, given consultation with the instructor. Consult with instructor on “make-ups” if absences are unavoidable.

1. Regular attendance and weekly reading assignments (see “Books for Purchase”). (1/8 of the grade).

2.*One Book Review presentation. Select two or three titles from the attached list of books available in the library, from which you will select one in the “raffle” assignment at the first class session, when the date of your review will be assigned. The review is to include the following: (a) a clear précis or overview of the book in relation to this course, (b) a brief discussion of up to ten ideas you have found helpful or informative, explaining why, and (c) the presentation of one important issue for class discussion. The reviewer is encouraged to prepare some “visuals” (hand-outs, chalk-board outlines, overhead projector transparencies, etc.) to enhance communication. (Proposed length: 5 pages) (3/8 of the grade)

3. A one-page, single-spaced amplification of the symbol (essay, story, poem, picture, icon, logo) that most aptly answers for you the question “Who do you say that I am?” Due the third last session of the semester (December 1). (not graded)

4. *A Final Project on a theme of the student’s choice, due last class session. (4/8 of the grade) (proposed length, 15-20 pages).

*All academic papers are to conform to conventional technical, grammatical and stylistic standards referred to in the General Guidelines for a Research Paper. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for work in the course.

Syllabus

Readings listed below are drawn from the required texts for the course; they provide background for the topic listed or for the course in general. In addition, a worksheet will be distributed each week anticipating the issues to be discussed at the following class session, with required primary source readings and questions for reflection.

Sept. 12 Prospectus :

Sept. 19 The Gospel According to Mark: God's Son of Man and Wounded Healer

• Pelikan, Jesus. . . . (a) Chap. 1. "The Rabbi" (9-20)
• Kärkkäinen, Christology,"The King of Jews in Matthew, " 33-36

• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 2. "The Turning Point of History" (21-33); chap. 3. "the Light of the Gentiles" (34-45)

Oct. 10 The Gospel According to John : The Word at the Heart of Being
• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 4, “the King of Kings” (46-56); chap. 5, “The Cosmic Christ” (57-70)

• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 7, "The True Image” (83-94); chap. 8, "Christ Crucified” (95-108)
• Kärkkäinen, Christology. Chap. 3, “Pauline Christology,” 44-60.

Oct. 24 The Gospel according to the Catholic Epistles and Revelation: From Shepherd of the Soul to the Invincible Lamb
• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 9, "The Monk Who Rules the World” (109-121)
Plus special reading on the Apocalypse and Christology.

Oct. 31 “The Other Gospels:” Gnostic Christology and the DaVinci Code
• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 10. “The Bridegroom of the Soul” (122-132)
• Ehrman, Lost Scriptures, Introduction, 1-8. All read the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (19-29; The Gospel of Peter, 31-34; The Gospel of Mary 35-38; The Gospel of Philip 38-44; The Proto-Gospel of James 63-72, and two others of your choice.

Nov. 7 The “Great Church”: From the Apostolic Fathers to Nicea and the Trinity
• Pelikan, Jesus. . . Chap. 11. "The Divine and Human Model" (133-144)
• Kärkkäinen, Christology. Chap. 4, “Early Christological Disputes,” 61-71; Chap. 5, “From the Council of Nicea (325) to Chalcedon (451)”, 72-78.
Nov. 14  Jesus Through the Centuries: From Nicea to the Twentieth Century
  • Pellikan, John. Chapters 12-18, Assignments to be parceled out in class
  Chap. 15. "The Teacher of Common Sense" 182-193
  Chap. 16. "The Poet of the Spirit" 194-205
  Chap. 17. "The Liberator" 206-219
  • Kärkkäinen, Christology, Chap. 6, "Subsequent Developments" 79-84; Chap. 7, "A New Christological Style" 85-90, plus selected reports on chapters on specific theologians (Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Hick), and on contextual Christologies (Process, Feminist, Black, Postmodern, etc.)

Nov. 28  Jesus at the Movies: Christology through the Camera's Eye
  Appendix B. Jesus-Story Films and Christ-figure Films" 245-52. Chaps. 7-14 for Special individual reports.
  Chap. 7. Pasolini, "The Gospel According to St. Mathew" 105-118
  Chap. 8. Jewison, "Jesus Christ Superstar" and Greene "Godspell" 119-136
  Chap. 9. Zeffirelli "Jesus of Nazareth" 137-148
  Chap. 10. Monty Python, "Life of Brian" 149-164
  Chap. 11 Heyman, "Jesus" 165-178
  Chap. 12. Scorsese, "The Last Temptation of Christ" 179-194
  Chap. 13 Arcand, "Jesus of Montreal" 195-208

Dec. 5 Revisioning the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Crossan, Borg, Capps, Miller
  • Powell, Jesus as a Figure in History, Introduction, 1-10; Chap. 1 "Historians Discover Jesus" 11-30; Chap. 3. "snapshots: Contemporary Images of Jesus" 51-64, plus a chapter of your choice, either on Crossan, Borg, Sanders, Meier, or Wright.

Dec. 12 Jesus at Christmas: A Time for Christological Re-conception
  • Handouts on John Miller, Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait (Fortress, 1997), plus time for Christological re-conception.

Book Selection List and Bibliography
(Asterisk * = Titles for book review selection. # = Resources on Reserve)

. Borg, Marcus, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)
. *Charlesworth, James H., and Loren L. Johns, eds., Hillel and Jesus (Fortress, 1997)
* Swidler, Leonard and Paul Mojzes, eds., The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter (Orbis, 1997)
* Wink, Walter The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium ( Doubleday, 1999)